No. 75

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

Suddenly she heard a peculiar noise. It sounded very much as if someone was trying the rear door. For quite a while she sat rigid and listened intently.
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GORDON seemed surprised to hear the governess express herself in the manner she did. He more than suspected that she was hiding something from him. How could she ask such a question?

"What happened, Mr. Gordon?" she repeated, still looking so very innocent.

"Oh, don't put me off that way, Miss Desmond. I know all about it." Phil met her startled gaze squarely. "Don't you think that you might have wired me? Suppose that insane fool, whoever he was, had succeeded in murdering you?"

"But he didn't," she responded lamely.

"That isn't your fault," he declared. "The newspaper account had it that it took two physicians to keep you alive.

"They succeeded, I can see." Gordon's eyes grew hard "And now that I am here, I shall not rest until the criminal is found. I am going to police headquarters as soon as I get through talking to you, and order an investigation.

"I'll spend every dollar I own, if need be, to send this would-be murder to the penitentiary. No matter who the fiend may be, he or she must be brought to justice."

Marie's face took on an expression of fright.

Phil must never know the truth. He must not even come to suspect what a woman's intuition told her. A shrewd detective might track Alice down.

"No—no, you mustn't!" she gasped.

"Why not?" He was staring hard at her now.

"Because——"

"Because what, Miss Desmond?"

When she failed to answer he took a few turns up and down the room. Then, suddenly, he spit out the

question:

"Is Alice here in Miami?"

It was a long time before Marie found the courage to answer. In fact it took so long that Phil repeated the question.

"She was here," she admitted at last in a whisper.

"How long ago?"

"I—I can't just remember, Mr. Gordon."

Gordon looked at the governess for a long time.

"Was anyone with her?" he demanded.

"I—I don't know," came back falteringly.

"Now look here," Gordon exclaimed. "You are not telling me all you know. How did you find out that Alice was here in Miami? Did you see her on the beach or did she——"

"I saw her on the beach one day," Marie interrupted, still trying to shield the woman who would have murdered her. "Another woman was with her, Mrs. Courtney."

"Mrs. Courtney!" Phil repeated with all the contempt he could put into the words. "A fit companion for Alice. Who was with these two?"

Phil was losing his patience fast. He could not understand why this governess should be so disinclined to answer his questions. What was her motive? When he spoke again, his voice was like thunder.

"I'll find out for myself if you won't tell me, Miss Desmond. I'll go through the register in every hotel in Miami."

Marie was beginning to see the uselessness of her reticense.

"If you must know, I'll tell you," she murmured. "Mr. Lorimer and Mr. Ballard were with — with your wife."

"Two rotters!" Gordon spit out the words. "Al-

right, that settles it. As soon as I get back to Chicago, I'll start divorce proceedings at once. I will not permit that woman to drag my name still further into the mire.

"I have refrained from doing so because I dread the scandal which is sure to follow. But this is positively the end. I have stood for entirely too much from that woman. She must be punished as she deserves."

After he had cooled down he resumed his seat.

The suspicion which had taken root in his heart on his trip to Miami grew fast as he sat there contemplating the lovely governess lying before him.

There was not the least doubt in his mind but that Alice was perfectly capable of attempting the murder of Marie Desmond by sending her poisoned candy.

She had always been insanely jealous of the beautiful governess. He could never forget the look of intense hatred Alice had given her when they met the last time in his presence.

Marie interrupted his unpleasant train of thought.

"Since you are here, I have something else to tell you, Mr. Gordon," she began in a voice that quivered slightly. And then she went on to relate the automobile accident. "Perhaps you will scold me for not having told you about that in my weekly letters."

"I ought to scold you," he said mildly. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"It — it was not serious," she retorted without meeting his grave eyes. "And—and I did not want you to worry."

"Very considerate of you, my dear Miss Desmond. You know," he went on, leaning forward. "You are a puzzle to me. You seem to make it a specialty to sacrifice yourself for others. You have been a mother to my children. You have shielded me. And now." he finished.

his voice rising suddenly, "you are trying to shield the woman who tried to murder you. Now don't try to deny it. You are shielding Alice."

Marie sat up in bed with a jerk. Both of her hands were extended. Horrified surprise was mirrored in her eyes.

"No—no! It is not true!" she cried. "It was not Alice. It could not have been."

Gordon rose. He made an attempt to hide his impatience. Consideration for the woman, still far from well, prompted him to end the argument.

However, he vowed silently that he would leave no stone unturned to locate his second wife.

His smile did not come readily as he bent over and reached for one of the slim white hands lying on the coverlet.

"I am a brute to annoy you this way," he accused himself. "And I ask you to forgive me. Who the sender of the poisoned candy was does not matter now. Thank God your life was spared to the children—and—and me. I am going to stay here until you are well, then we'll return home together."

Marie's heart beat frantically.

"Yes, home together," she repeated in a whisper, then closed her eyes.

Phil released her hand when he noticed that the patient had evidently been weakened by his talk with her.

Petting her dark head very tenderly, he stole from the room and closed the door noiselessly.

During the next fifteen minutes he grilled Annie. The girl admitted a few things which served to convince him that the person she had seen prowling about the cottage at night had been a woman.

In fact Annie disclosed a few facts she had kept

hidden from the governess.

"Not a word to anyone about this conversation between us, Annie," he told her at its conclusion. "I am convinced in my own mind that my wife was the sender of that poisoned candy."

"So am I," the maid admitted. "And I belive Miss Desmond knows."

"Of course she knows," he answered quickly. "And I can not understand why she should want to shield Alice. She is the strangest woman I ever met in all my life."

Annie was staring at the floor. She could have told Gordon why this governess wanted to have the matter hushed up.

She could have told him something that would have made him frantic with joy.

But she had promised faithfully not to reveal that Miss Desmond was in reality Marie Gordon until the latter gave her leave.

"I am going to police headquarters now," Phil spoke again. "Within a few days I hope to see my wife behind prison bars where she belongs. I shall show her no mercy." His teeth snapped as he uttered the last words.

"Of course, Miss Desmond must be kept in ignorance of my intentions in the matter. She must not know the least thing about it.

"You are the most trusted servant in my employ, Annie," he continued, placing a hand on her shoulder. "I don't know what I would have done without you during those dark days when—I lost my first wife. Now you must promise me to keep absolutely silent."

"I promise, Mr. Gordon." Her voice as low and she did not raise her eyes to meet his.

When Gordon left the cottage to go to police head-

quarters a few minutes later, his face wore an expression of cold determination. There was but one purpose in his mind and heart.

Alice must be apprehended and punished to the full extent of the law. She must be exposed as the vile creature she was. She must be made to suffer as she made others suffer.

Chapter 246

THE TEST

THE DAY had come at last when Walter Wayne had to stop and give himself over to the cool and unbiased analysis of the situation. He could do nothing else. Conditions demanded it. His peace of mind demanded it, and his very soul cried out in anguish for fear of dying a violent death.

With every atom of his reserve strength he fought against this thing that was driving him to the brink of madness.

He had never loved a human being, not even himself, as he loved his beautiful wife. Marian had become to him what the sun is to a flower.

And as the flower would wither deprived of light and warmth, so his life was doomed to desolation without her love.

There had been rumors and innuendos at the club. Marian's name was being coupled with that of Van Cleve.

Several times he had come upon a group of his friends engaged in a whispered conversation which had ceased with baffling abruptness at his approach. It had begun to worry him in no small degree.

And now he was asking himself the question: "What does this mean?"

He was constantly torturing himself with these uncertainties. One thing was sure, if he wanted to keep a sane mind he must get at the bottom of it.

There had not been the slightest change in Marian's manner toward him.

She still responded to his kisses and caresses with the same ardor and she had never given him the slightest reason to doubt her. And yet there had come a subtle change.

She had become more extravagant in her expenditure of money for pretty clothes and trinkets so dear to a woman's heart. She had gone so far as to engage an additional maid to keep her wardrobe in order.

Wayne did not mind this, for he could afford it.

He granted her every request for money and more money as he had always done without hesitation and with the same indulgent smile. And he smiled somewhat whimsically to himself now as he thought about it.

Then suddenly his mind began to wander in a different direction.

What would Marian say if he told her that he could no longer countenance the vast expenditure of money for clothes and luxuries?

How would she accept his ultimatum that she must cut expenses, discharge both of her maids and look after herself?

As he contemplated the possibilities his smile was no longer whimsical or even pleasant. He loved this woman passionately. Would she remain true and loyal to him when reverses came?

And here he could not help but think of the story Marian's first husband had told him.

So Wayne found himself at last vainly grasping for some sort of a conclusion. And as it flashed through his mind it made him shiver with its possibilities.

"By God," he gasped, "I'll put her to the test."

The first thing he did was to spread the rumor among his friends that he was about to go into bankruptcy.

The story spread like wild fire. The newspapers

printed it and it became the common topic of conversation at the clubs and in financial circles.

Wayne was rather surprised when his wife took it philosophically. He had expected something else.

True, she looked a trifle pale and worried, but on the whole played the part of a good loser.

"I am sorry this thing had to come when we were just beginning to get some real pleasure out of life, dear," he told her one evening as they were seated alone in the library. "But I suppose we shall have to make the best of it."

Marian breathed a deep sigh and made no answer.

"Of course," her husband went on, "we shall be compelled to do without the servants and——"

"Can't I have one maid?" she interrupted.

"Well, perhaps we can afford one," Wayne said with well-feigned indifference. "But we will have to sell the cars and move into smaller quarters. You won't mind that, will you, dear?"

As he uttered these words he was watching Marian closely. His heart sank.

"I am very sorry, Walter," she said, tears of bitter disappointment welling up in her eyes. "I need some new gowns. Mrs. Ferris was kind enough to invite me to her reception next Wednesday. I haven't anything decent to wear."

He gazed at her, his brows arched.

"Haven't you?" he asked in mock sympathy. "Well, that is too bad. I am afraid you'll have to make your old gowns do for a while. You see, I can't give you what I haven't got.

"Money is very scarce with me now and will be for some time to come. And of course, you can not buy any new gowns without it. As I said before, you will have to make your old ones do for sometime to come."

When Wayne finished speaking, he reached over and kissed his wife. But she was not as responsive as usual.

He drew back, feeling the sting.

"What is the matter?" he asked in a hurt tone.

"Oh, nothing," she answered. "Only, I am terribly disappointed."

"So am I," he agreed.

For a long time neither spoke again.

He had surely expected that his wife would offer some words of consolation to him in his financial trouble and express at least a little sympathy.

But nothing of the kind happened.

She was thinking only of herself. He could see that plainly.

Could it be possible after all that she loved him and had married him because he was able to give her the things she craved?

He addressed a few more words to her which met with little or no response.

Finally he rose and left the library, his eyes misty and his jaw set with a new determination.

Alone in his room he busied himself making the necesary preparations for putting his plan through.

And he meant to go through with it to the very end.

The next morning he arose at the usual hour. He paid all the servants and dismissed them, except his wife's oldest maid. For a reason of his own he decided to stay in the big house for the present.

He went to the bank and drew out all his money. This, with the bond and stock certificates he had, he placed in the little safe in the wall of his room.

Marian did not come downstairs until noon. She was shocked to learn that all of the servants had been

dismissed.

Something like resentment crept into her eyes.

She found a short explanatory note from her husband, who aso informed her that he had gone to his office for the purpose of closing it up for the present.

That evening when he returned home, he found Marian gone. Her maid informed him that she had left the house after a lengthy telephone conversation with someone.

Upon being questioned closely, the maid admitted that her mistress had been talking to a man, whose name she could not remember.

Wayne had always prided himself upon his faith in his fellow men. The faith he reposed in his wife had been blind, and he realized that now.

It had suffered shipwreck on the ocean of doubt, and doubt once in full sway, gave way to suspicion.

And yet, he was not ready to believe anything base of his wife. He couldn't. The very thought sent a chill through him.

It was nearly seven o'clock when Marian came home. From a window in his room he saw her jump out of a taxi which had drawn up in front of the house.

And he saw also that she carried a large box of the kind used by fashionable dressmaking establishments.

Marian entered the hall, cast a furtive glance into the sitting room, then hurried upstairs to her boudoir.

Wayne, emerging from his room, caught a glimpse of her as she disappeared behind the closed door which was quickly locked from the inside. He paused for a moment.

What was the flush on her face? Was it the flush of guilt? And why had she locked the door?

He recalled that he had not given his wife any

money for clothes and, obviously, she had bought a new gown. He was growing more suspicious every moment and his heart beat at irregular intervals.

Going downstairs, he waited.

Evidently Marian knew that he was waiting for her, for she sent word with her maid saying that she wanted to be excused for the evening, that she was suffering with a headache.

Somehow the atmosphere in the house had become stifling. He snatched his hat from the rack in the hall and ran out.

For almost an hour he wandered aimlessly about, until finally he found himself in front of the club. For a few minutes he stood undecided. then entered.

Chapter 247

THE UGLY TRUTH

AS IT WAS still early in the evening, only a few members were present. The dapper young man at the desk gave Walter Wayne a friendly nod as he passed to go into the reading room. Only one man was seated in there with his back turned to the door. He was reading a magazine.

Wayne recognized him by the bald head and the big ears. Without any particular reason he chose a deep leather chair standing in the corner. And he did it in a manner that suggested stealth.

Unfolding a newspaper, he buried himself behind it and tried to read. He felt quite sure that Van Cleve had not observed him.

Presently one of the club members, Mr. Barnes entered. Not taking the trouble to see who was in the room beside Van Cleve, he walked up to the latter and slapped him on the choulder.

"Say, you old sinner," he said in a tone loud enough for Wayne to hear, "what do you mean by escorting another man's wife on a shopping tour?"

"What is the matter, Barnes," Van Cleve retorted with a show of anger. "Have you suddenly gone insane?"

"No, I don't think so," the other responded, laughing. "I am quite sane and my eyesight is still good, at least good enough to recognize the lovely Mrs. Wayne and the man who happened to be with her."

Wayne sat as if turned to stone. He grew cold, then hot. He was holding the newspaper rigid.

Then came Van Cleve's voice, low, exasperated.

"My meeting with Mrs. Wayne was accidental," he was saying.

"Then I suppose it was also quite accidental that Adam bit in the apple handed him by Eve," Barnes replied meaningly and with another laugh that was extremely unpleasant. "Come, now, old man, that sort of an excuse is too thin. Think up something better."

Van Cleve made no answer, but threw the magazine he had been reading on the table, rose, and stalked from the room. Barnes followed him.

Wayne sat quietly for a few minutes longer, then rose also and left the club like a sneaking thief. Again the long dammed terror of suspicion broke loose.

It enveloped his entire being.

He raced toward home like a madman, his breath coming in thick, short gasps. His intentions was to take his wife by the throat and choke the truth out of her.

But the closer he came to the house, the more he began to realize the folly of such a thing. He could not accuse her of allowing Van Cleve to buy new gowns for her. The necessary proof was absolutely lacking.

Yet, there was that horrible suspicion.

He was actualy afraid to trust himself alone with Mariam, for he feared that in his wild jealousy he might do something that he was sure to regret for the rest of his life.

Going to his room, he put a few things into a traveling bag. Then he sat down and wrote a note to his wife, informing her that he had been called out of the city on some urgent business and that he would not be back for a week.

Placing the letter in a conspicious place, he left the house.

He had not the least idea where he was going, but

he must be alone for a few days to think this thing out.

It was utterly out of the question io discuss it with his wife. He went to a hotel where he spent the night. And what a night it was!

The following morning he spent at the club. It was about noon when the clerk handed him a letter, saying that it had just arrived by mail. Wayne ripped the envelope open, his hands trembling.

It proved to be a warning coming from an anonymous source, and this is what it said:

Dear Sir:

You are being deceived by your wife. Keep an eye on Van Cleve.

A Friend.

Wayne crushed the letter with a savage imprecation. So it had come to this.

Somehow he felt that Marian's first husband was the writer of the letter. He called Mr. Prescott up immediately, asking for an interview. He was told to come to the latter's office at once.

In less than thirty minutes Wayne presented himself.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Wayne," was Prescott's greeting. "Have a seat."

But Wayne did not accept the invitation to be seated.

"I want to ask you a question as man to man," he began, coming straight to the point. "Someone sent me an anonymous letter warning me against my—my wife.

Are you the writer of it?"

Prescott shook his head. He faced the speaker, his eyes steady.

"I am not, sir," he said with dignity. "Were I the author of it I would have signed my name."

For a long moment the two men looked at each other.

"You were kind enough to pay me a visit once before," Prescott continued. "You asked me then to tell you the absolute truth, and I did. You married Marian in spite of it. I suppose you have found out that——"

"Nothing as yet," the other interrupted fiercely.

"Do you suspect her, Mr. Wayne?" the question was asked in a mild tone.

"To be frank, yes," Wayne replied.

"Have you made your suspicion known to her?"

"I have not, sir. I despise suspicions. What I am after is the truth. And I will not rest until I have it."

Prescott walked around his desk, then sat down. The expression on his face was one of genuine sympathy. He evidently wanted to say something and did not know how to begin.

Suddenly his train of thought shifted.

"May I suggest something to you, Mr. Wayne?" he said almost softly.

The latter nodded.

"I do not know what your domestic troubles are," Prescott went on. "I have heard that you were in financial difficulties. I take it for granted that that is where your trouble originated. You are about to suffer what I did. And you want to be sure before you speak. Put your wife to the test."

Wayne bit his lip. His face was white and tense.

"That has already been done, and she failed to—to——"

"Just what I expected," the other broke in. "And now I suppose your wife is casting about for——" he hesitated, then finally added: "I would like to put it in a less offensive way if I could, but it can't be done.

"Your wife does not take kindly to being deprived of the luxuries she has been used to. She resents it. All women of her kind do that. I am really not the least bit surprised, my friend."

The visitor, still standing, leaned forward, his teeth clenched.

"You might as well know the truth," he cried, trembling from head to foot. "I have been led to believe that Van Cleve is buying her gowns."

Prescott whistled softly.

"Van Cleve, eh?" he murmured. "It doesn't surprise me very much. Of course, he has the money. He is one of the richest men in Chicago. No doubt she made a play for him."

"She did [illegible]t," Wayne responded. "And what I want now is to catch them together. If I do, this old town will get a shock."

There was a dangerous glint in his eyes as he uttered the last words.

"Don't do anything you might be sorry for, old man," Prescott advised. "The woman isn't worth it. As soon as you have sufficient ground, institute divorce proceedings, then forget that you ever knew her."

"That is easier said than done," the visitor cried. "I love her."

Prescott smiled compassionately.

"Yes, I know you do, my poor friend," he said. "And you would never have married her if you hadn't loved her. But it would be folly to go on with her now. If you suspect that she is deceiving you, give her plenty of rope.

"Go away for a week, then come home unexpectedly some night and perhaps you'll be convinced. It is an old, old trick but it never fails to bring the desired result."

"That is a good suggestion," Wayne retorted in a tone of bitter anger "In fact, I had already made up my mind to do that very thing."

"Then do it by all means I shall watch the result with more than ordinary interest, Mr. Wayne."

Prescott began to busy himself with some papers on his desk.

Wayne took this as an indication that the interview was terminated and took his departure with a curt:

"Good-by."

On his way to the railroad station it occurred to him that he had an old aunt living in the country.

That would be as good a place as any to while away a few days. It was only fifty miles from Chicago, and he could come back whenever he desired.

But he spent only two day—days filled with unspeakable mental torture—in the country.

On the third day, late in the afternoon, he took the train for Chicago.

The same brain-racking thoughts beset him. He suffered terribly, and what tormented him most was the uncertainty.

He did not know whether to hate or love his wife.

His mental anguish was excruciating. Upon his arriva in the city he sought for distraction.

He went into a movie theater and sat down not to see the play, but to weigh matters once more very carefully and calmly.

"It may be that my suspicions are groundless," he muttered to himself, still hoping against hope. "Perhaps when I get home I shall find her asleep, and alone.

"Perhaps I have been doing her an injustice, and if that proves to be the case I shall beg her pardon on my knees. Oh, I hope it was all a phantom of my brain. Oh, I hope and pray that I was mistaken in Marian."

In this manner he tried hard to cajole himself into believing that his wife was still loyal to him.

He wanted to believe that she was all his own.

But the demons of black suspicion again began their dance of death. He shuddered and closed his eyes.

People came into the theater and went out again, having seen the play. They brushed past him with merry laughter, but he neither saw or heard them. It seemed his mind had stopped functioning.

The sudden jolt from an impatient usher brought him out of the lethargy He stared about as if in a dream and muttered some incoherent words.

"You'll have to leave," the usher was saying. "The last show is over and we are going to close. Come on."

Wayne rose unsteadily to his feet. A feeling of physical nausea swept over him, but it wore off to some extent as he came out into the cool night air.

He drew out his watch mechanically and looked at it. The hour was close to midnight.

For some time he stood irresolute. He had a very wholesome dread of playing the spy upon his wife.

He would gladly have given all he possessed to go home with an untroubled mind, knowing that this thing had all been a ghastly dream. But it wasn't.

It had become hideous reality.

The situation involving his wife presented a parallel to the story which Mr. Prescott had told him. Having been denied the money for expensive clothes, she had deliberately obtained it from another man.

And the man was none other than Van Cleve.

"Damn him!" he muttered fiercely. "I would like

to put a bullet through him. He deserves it, the filthy home breaker."

Before he knew it the desire to kill became deeply rooted in the deceived husband's heart. An outrage like this could be punished only by shedding blood. Nothing else could satisfy him. And the lust for killing grew stronger within him.

Chapter 248

THE PRICE

WAYNE'S first thought was to hail one of the passing taxis and drive home, for a sudden desire had taken hold of him to have it all over with as quickly as possible. But his limbs were cramped, his bones ached, and some vigorous physical exercise was what he needed right now.

He pulled himself together and started off at a brisk pace. It was some time after twelve when he came within sight of his home.

An expensive closed car stood in front of the house.

The house was dark save for a narrow rift of light which came from the lower end of a curtain not tightly drawn in the sitting room.

Like a thief in the night he stole up to the front entrance and opened the door cautiously with his latch key. For a moment he paused to make sure that he had not been heard.

The hall was in semi-darkness and he perceived a man's hat and light overcoat hanging on the rack.

From the sitting room came the sound of voices. His wife said something he could not quite understand, but the answer came clear and distinct.

"You are beautiful, Marian," came in a deep, baritone voice. "What man could resist you. I love you."

"But you must not say such things to me," she replied in a bantering tone "What would your wife say if she knew that you are buying clothes for me?"

"Right now I don't want to be reminded that I

have a wife," the man responded fervently.

Wayne moved toward the reception room. The heavy portieres in the door separating it from the sitting room were drawn. The odor of scented cigarettes struck his nostrils.

He recalled that there was only one man among his friends and acquaintances who smoked them.

He approached the portiers like a shadow, and drew them apart sufficiently to permit a glance into the sitting room.

The next instant he retreated with a gasp.

His wife—his own Marian was in the arms of Van Cleve, and she was responding to his kisses. Her arms were around his neck, while he held her close.

And there was something in that embrace — in those kisses which verified his worst suspicions.

Wayne's first impulse was to rush in and strangle them both, but his mind, strangely clear and calm now, suggested something else.

Retracing his steps, he went into the hall, then up the stairs. In his room he turned on the light and stepped to the dresser. The face he saw in the mirror was not like his own.

It was distorted almost beyond recognition.

Pulling out the top drawer he fondled the revolver for a few seconds, then laid it down again.

"No," he said to himself, "why waste lead. Besides, the shots would arouse the neighborhood. The police would interfere. It must be done as quietly as possible."

Gliding over to the closet he inspected several other weapons he possessed. There were two shotguns, a rifle and a hunting knife.

He selected the knife, drew it out of its sheath and tested the blade. It was sharp enough. He nodded with

a hideous grimace.

Concealing the knife in his pocket he went downstairs as noiselessly as he had come up.

This time he did not approach the portiers with caution. He sprang forward and tore them apart.

The guilty couple rose to their feet. The man uttered a low curse, and the woman gave a little scream.

What Wayne would remember to his dying day was the expression of their faces because it afforded him an excruciating pleasure at that moment.

It was an expression of terror, and that was exactly what he desired.

He could never forget the despair and terror that was visible on their faces the first instant they beheld him.

Van Cleve quickly moved backward and leaned against the wall. Marian, white as death, stood swaying like a reed in the wind. There was something in her look which betrayed anxiety for her lover.

Wayne smiled wickedly as he said with utmost coolness:

"Ah, I see my wife has a visitor."

"I dropped in for a little chat," Van Cleve sought to excuse. "I——"

"Yes, I did not expect——" Marian said at the same time. "We——"

But neither of them finished their remarks.

Wayne's uncontrollable rage flashed to the surface. Weariness and disgust were depicted in every line of his features. But the most deadly hatred gained the upper hand.

Neither Van Cleve nor Marian seemed to be prepared for what was about to happen, for they evidently thought that the scene could be laughed off.

"Why, old man, I hope you don't believe that——"

Van Cleve said, attempting to laugh.

"Shut up, you damned hound!" Wayne snarled.

The next instant he flung himself upon his wife, his fingers curled up like claws. And as he did so he kept an eye on the man.

"I am going to kill you!" he cried, reaching for her throat. "I'll make an end of you right now!"

As he spoke he released one hand which went straight to his pocket. At sight of the gleaming knife, Marian uttered a fierce scream.

"Walter — Walter, for God's sake!" she whimpered.

Van Cleve sprang forward.

"Don't do anything like that, Wayne," he exclaimed. "Give me that knife."

Wayne quickly dropped his hands and rushed at Van Cleve.

"All right, if you want yours first," he snarled, the knife raised to strike.

Van Cleve turned white to his lips and retreated, then turned suddenly and ran from the room. Wayne went after him.

His movements were impeded when Marian clung to his arm.

He struggled to free himself. This unlooked for hindrance, the dragging weight, and her touch, served only to inflame him still more.

It was maddening, this thought that his wife now sought to protect her lover.

Striking backward with his left arm with all the force he could put into it, he hit her with his elbow in the face.

Marian screamed and let go of his arm.

Wayne was on the point of running after Van Cleve, who had reached the front exit, but upon second

thought he refrained from doing so.

He turned around looking for his wife. She had fallen on the divan, and, holding her hands up to her bruised eyes, was gazing at him.

Her face was expressive of terror and of deep hatred for the man who had struck her.

It was just such a look as a rat might give when the trap in which it has been caught is held up to the light.

Wayne might have restrained himself even then, had she remained silent. But she began to assail him in the worst posible terms and clutched for the hand holding the knife.

"You are crazy!" she shouted. "You was a brute to hit me like that. Nothing has happened, I tell you, you jealous fool!"

The last words from which Wayne inferred the contrary of what they affirmed — that everything had happened — these wors called for a reply.

And the reply must correspond to the condition into which he had lashed himself, and which was increasing and must continue to increase. Even rage has its laws.

"Don't lie to me, you mercenary wretch!" he roared. "You would sell yourself to the highest bidder, body and soul. I bought you once, you sold yourself the second time, but it shall be the last."

With his left hand he seized her hands. She then struggled fiercely to disengage herself.

Then without dropping the knife, he seized her by the throat and forced her to the floor and began to strangle her.

With her two hands she clutched at his, tearing them from her throat.

Then with a frightful oath he raised the knife and

plunged it into her left side.

When people say that they do not remember what they do in a fit of fury, they talk nonsense. It is false.

Wayne remembered everything. He did not lose his consciousness for a single moment.

The more he lashed himself into that fury, the clearer his mind became, and he could not help seeing what he did.

His consciousness of the deed and of its nature was painfully distinct.

He felt the momentary resistance of her corset, and of something else, and the passage of the knife cutting its way through the soft parts of her body.

She seized the knife with both hands, wounding them, but without staying its progress.

He knew the act had been accomplished and became terribly conscious that he was killing, that he had killed, a woman, a defenseless woman, his own wife.

And he also knew that, having plunged the knife into her body, he drew it out again.

Then he rose unsteadily and stood motionless for an instant, waiting to see what would happen, and whether it was possible to undo it.

Suddenly Marian sprang to her feet, crying for her maid.

"Bessie—help!" she screamed, the blood spurting from the wound. "He has murdered me."

There was a quick patter of feet and the door opened.

Chapter 249

THE END

IN RESPONSE to the cry of her mistress, the maid rushed in, and, appalled at what she saw, leaned against the wall for a moment. Wayne stood erect, still waiting, hardly able to believe what had happened. Then another spurt of red blood came from the wound. He understood now that all reparation was impossible.

He saw his wife fall.

The maid ran to her sobbing.

"Merciful God," she wept. "Speak to me, Mrs. Wayne."

But no response was forthcoming.

Wayne hesitated, then threw the knife on the floor and left the room.

And alone in his chamber, he took the revolver from the dresser, first making sure that it was loaded, then sat down and coolly lit a cigar.

Placing the weapon on the table within easy reach, he sat down and sat quietly for a long time. He could think of nothing. In fact he did not want to remember anything.

He was overcome with a sudden drowsiness and fell asleep.

His mental faculties would not succumb, however.

He began to dream and dreamt that he was living on terms of affection with Marian, that he had quarreled with her, but that there was some little obstacle in the way as they were making up.

A loud knock on the door awakened him.

His first thought was that the police had come to arrest him. He rose and took the revolver in his hand. Looking into the barrel for a moment, he laid it down again.

"No, I won't kill myself," he muttered. "I'll get out of this."

The knocking on the door continued.

Wayne opened. It was Bessie, the maid.

"I have sent for the doctor," she told him. "He is examining Mrs. Wayne now and he says there is no hope. She is dying."

He paused, undecided.

"Won't you come?" the maid begged. "She can't last much longer and she wants to see you."

Wayne nodded and like a man in a trance followed the maid to Marian's boudoir. A vain hope had arisen in his heart that it might not be true—that it was all a ghastly dream.

But the pungent smell of the abominable drugs, of iodoform, of carbolic acid, overpowered him and then he knew that it was all dreadful reality.

Upon entering his wife's chamber, the first thing he noticed was her gown lying on the floor, all red with blood.

Marian was lying on her bed, her head and chest raised high. Something had been laid on the place where her wound was.

What impressed him most profoundly, was her swollen, bruised face, the eyes and nose being of a bluish, black color—the result of the blow he had struck her with his elbow when she was trying to hold him back.

No trace of her former beauty was left, but instead he noticed something repulsive in her.

"Where is the doctor?" he asked, turning to the

maid.

"He is waiting downstairs," she answered. "But won't you please speak—to her?"

The maid was crying.

Wayne approached the bed. Marian raised her eyes with difficulty.

"I suppose you are satisfied now, for you have killed me!" she said in a scarcely audible voice. "Oh, God, I don't want to die!"

He felt an impulse to say something soothing, but he could not find words.

Then suddenly she was seized with a coughing spell. The bandage on her breast became saturated with blood.

For a moment her body writhed as if in pain, then she lay quite still.

Wayne bent over and looked at her closely. Her eyes were closed and the cold rigor of death was settling upon her features.

He drew back with a hoarse cry and fled from the room.

On his way downstairs he did some quick thinking, for now that the mad deed was done, he found himself face to face with the consequences.

He had no regrets so far as his dead wife was concerned. She had wrecked his life and it was just and right that she should pay.

She had drawn him into her net with her fatal beauty only to play him false at the first opportunity. For that he hated her even in death.

His feeling of resentfulness toward Van Cleve died down. He was merely the man she had picked out for her next victim.

If it had not been Van Cleve, it would have been someone else.

What right had a woman to live who spread nothing but misery and was the tireless creator of heartaches?

Naturally, the first thought which suggested itself was instantaneous flight.

The idea of remaining and facing the consequences was ridiculous. Wayne knew well enough what he had to expect.

A woman might commit deliberate murder and be acquitted by a jury, but with a man it was different.

In his case an adequate and logical defense was impossible.

It was a case of cold, deliberate, premeditated murder.

There would be a short trial, sickening with all the sensational, sordid details, and then the inevitable—the electric chair.

Wayne gave an involuntary shudder as he contemplated the idea.

As he entered the sitting room, a tall, dignified man rose to meet him.

He recognized him at once as Dr. Chalmers, the family physician. For a full minute both men stood facing each other. Neither spoke.

"Hello, doctor," Wayne said at last, his voice trembling a little.

"What is the matter, man, have you suddenly lost your mind?" the physician replied gravely. "I was called by your servant and found your wife dying with a knife wound in her breast. Do you know that she hasn't a chance?"

Wayne's eyes shifted. He made an impatient gesture.

The doctor regarded him suspiciously.

Continued in next number

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